

# COMMENTARIUS

ART AND LITERARY MAGAZINE



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# CONTRIBUTORS

## Art

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*The Hands Project*  
by Trinity Fernandez



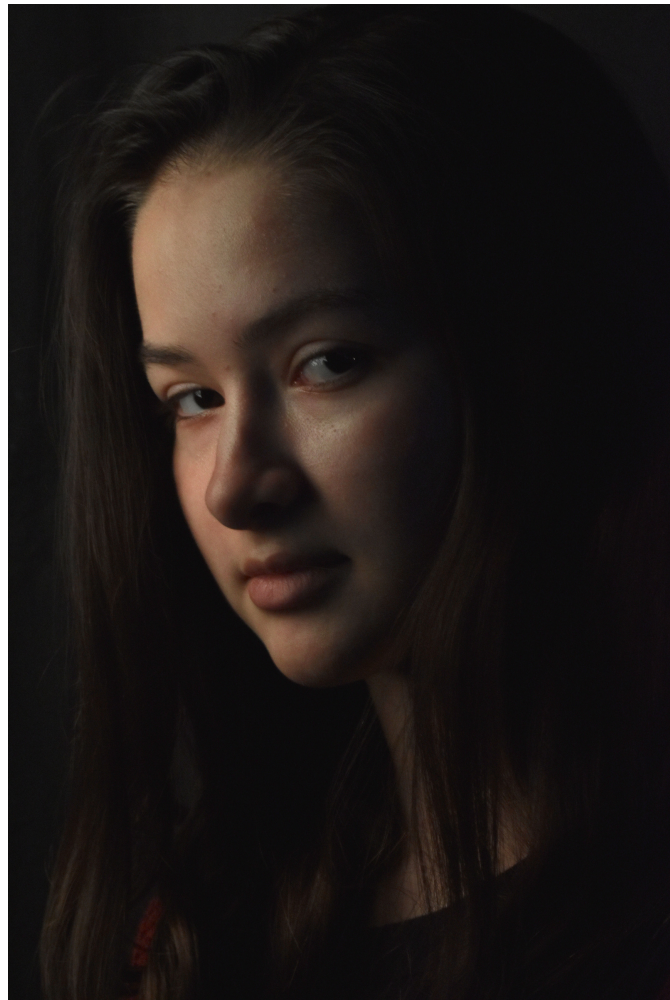
# An Apology

The third issue of the Commentarius in the 2019-20 school year never came out last year. This was not because the students at Cooper were no longer submitting enough works to warrant an issue. They did. In fact, we probably had more works submitted to the Commentarius than the other issues earlier in the year.

It was last February, and my interview was with Cheryl Barber on February 27th. The poems were lined up and discussed by the Creative Writing class, and we were set to pick the art and arrange it in the magazine. When we came back from spring break, we were going to make the final changes and send out the issue. Then, COVID-19.

I had plans to still put out the issue later in the spring, but it felt tone deaf to everything that was happening around us. Art and Literature are supposed to be mirrors to society. But, the poems in the issue didn't reflect the new world we were living in at all. The art didn't have a tinge of it inside of the photos or drawings either. Even the hour and half interview I had recorded of my conversation with Barber didn't even mention the event that evidently was looming in the background, quietly waiting.

In the weeks of the "COVID-cation", as one of my online students that spring semester called it, I was daunted by the decision. It was the beginning of April when I realized that I couldn't put out the same issue I had planned. Would my five readers, including my wife, care if the third issue never happened? Maybe not. But, I did.



*Innocence*  
by Dikchya Biswa

The ultimate decision was this: let's do a do over. New Pieces, New Art, and a revised Interview with Cheryl Barber. And, possibly, a new viewpoint that gave credit and vision to our collective experience.

I write this to apologize to the students and faculty who had submitted pieces that were ultimately unused last year in that third issue, and hope they will continue to submit and be a part of this revitalized tradition at Cooper of sharing our art and literature with each other. Thank you for your patience and patronage of The Commentarius.

Steven Wegrzynowicz



*Lady in the Dark*  
by Jayln Thomas

Into the Woods  
by Jaime Herrera

A door slams behind her and her footsteps are heavy, full of purpose and misdirection. Hot tears stream down her face and sweat sticks to her forehead. She viciously wipes both her tears and sweat away with her sweatshirt sleeve. She walks along the sidewalk, seeing the dandelions reminds her of her carefree years of when she would make wishes and place all of her hope on a simple, delicate flower. She almost stops to pick a few but she fights the urge and leaves them be. She can hear her mother screaming her name from the front porch to come back inside, "Drew, come back right now! Don't make me go get you myself!"

Drew knew from experience that her mother wouldn't come outside to grab her, she's made that threat too many times. Drew has contemplated running away several times, but she knew she could never survive on her own, which is why she stayed. She has bumps and bruises to prove why she wanted to leave in the first place. Over to her right are the woods, with inviting trees and singing birds to make it welcoming. She looks to her left and right to see if any cars are near and runs across the street, going into the woods, leaving her mother's screams to go somewhere quiet.

The woods are a familiar environment to Drew, almost like a first home. Since her mother only shows affection by yelling and punching, Drew knew she had to find a place that would accept her, and that place was the woods.

She takes the same path every time she walks through, it's easy to tell because her footsteps have killed the grass that used to grow there.

Five steps: a vibrant flower that never seems to die, even in the middle of winter.

Sixteen steps: a grotesque tree that she enjoys to climb up, read a book, and breathe in fresh air.

Twenty nine steps: a purple fire hydrant in the middle of tall, dry grass.

She's never made it past thirty eight steps. Her fear of getting lost in the woods always seemed to stop her. When she finally reached thirty eight, she contemplated continuing or going back home. Realizing that she could still feel her eyes bloodshot, she decided to continue walking. As she came to the decision, she knew this was a risk because she'd never been lost in the woods before and she knew her mother wouldn't leave home to find her. She made sure to remember her step count if she ever wanted to take longer walks.



by Liberty Price

Fifty two steps: a large rock that has a lot of moss in the upper left area.

Sixty seven steps: a beehive on a tree that almost looks dead.

Seventy five steps: an abandoned house that's roof is caving in.

She reaches for her phone in her back pocket but remembers that she left it in her room before she stormed off. Instead, she looks at her watch to check the time and realizes she's been gone for almost two hours, assuming that she stormed off around 4:30 P.M. Instead of continuing her walk, she decides to make her way back home. She could hear her stomach growling, she was becoming so hungry that it felt like her stomach was eating itself. Her mother never made anything for dinner so Drew always had to fend for herself, she either got fast food or made mediocre macaroni and cheese. She reached into her front pocket to see if she had a twenty dollar bill, she didn't feel like cooking tonight. She could feel the folded up dollar bill and pulled it out to see if it was enough. It was crumpled up twenty but it would do. She starts to walk and looks at the abandoned house and starts to wonder who lived there and why it fell apart. As she's staring, it reminds her too much of her broken home and quickly turns around to start walking back. But when she turns around, she doesn't recognize her surroundings. She quickly starts to panic and hyperventilate. She can feel her pulse in her brain and she starts to sweat. She's turning in circles, trying to remember where she was before she saw the abandoned house. Dizziness overcomes her, she trips and almost falls over. She rubs her temples as a migraine starts to approach her, she pulls out an ibuprofen from her pocket, swallows it dry, and sits on the grass trying to relax.

Thirteen minutes pass, her ibuprofen is doing very little for her migraine but she decides to look past it. She realizes she's never going to get home if she's sitting on the ground so she decides to stand up, her knees are brittle and she can hear them pop as she stands. She takes a deep breath and looks around her to see if she recognizes anything. She sees little pebbles that she remembers passing by and decides to follow them.

Five minutes pass of her walking and she keeps looking for the beehive on the almost dead tree that marked sixty seven steps. Her eyes try to find anything that looks like the beehive or the bees that passed her. When she can't find anything that resembles it, she tries to hear the buzzing. It's very faint but she can hear the buzzing from the bees. Because it's so quiet, she can't decipher where it's coming from, and finally decides to walk to her left. The buzzing gets quieter and she walks towards where she was before. Her stomach starts to growl again and at times, she can't tell the buzzing and the grumbling apart. She decides to keep walking forward instead of trying to

decipher where the sound is coming from. She takes eight steps, looks to her left and sees the beehive attached to the tree. The buzzing of bees is now her favorite sound.

As she keeps walking, she sees everything that she passed when she made her trek hours prior. Drew starts to wonder what she'll tell her mother and how she'll avoid her punches that her mother will throw. Even if Drew told her where she was in the hours that she was gone, her mother wouldn't listen or understand. There was no point of telling the truth if she was going to get punished the same way she would if she lied. Drew decided to lie and tell her mother that she'd gone to a fast food restaurant across town, it worked every time she stormed out of the house.

Drew can tell she is almost out of the forest, she can hear the cars driving down the street. As a car drives by, her eyes start to wonder and she finds the flower that never seems to die, even when everything is against it. Instead of continuing to walk, she decides to sit next to the flower and admire it. Drew sometimes likes to compare herself to his flower, she has very little people to confide in, which is why she loves the woods so much. Even though they try, nobody seems to understand what she is going through, she is alone in this struggle. But somehow, she survives. She's survived every time her mother has slapped her, punched her, and insulted her, she has come out stronger each time. Drew looks at her watch one last time, 8:36. She looks through the trees and can see the front door of her house and is hesitant to walk back inside. Part of her wishes that she stayed lost in the woods but she knows she would never survive. She remembers the abandoned house that she saw before she got

lost and contemplates running away and living there but she remembers how extremely broken it is. As hard as it is for her to admit, she'd rather live in a house that isn't a home than live in a house without a roof. She finally stands up and is terrified of what is to come. She takes one last look at the flower and starts to walk towards the street. She looks left and right and walks across the street, anxiously awaiting for when she can leave this town and have the freedom she's craved her whole life.





*Recreation of lascapigilaga*  
by Morgan Kruse

The Ocean's Stars  
by Mackenzie Wasson

The vast field of stars above meets her eyes as she wakes. Water rushes quickly over her legs before retreating back to the sea. Grains of sand stick to her skin as she rises from the ground. Behind her is more water and the only land is the small piece on which she stands.

Her mind fills with memories of what had happened. She sees images of lightning setting her ship aflame and waves flooding the deck. She remembers falling into the sea when a massive wave slammed into her. She had been waiting for her husband to get into the lifeboat. She must have fallen unconscious. The only thing that had kept her alive was the life jacket she hastily threw on as her husband rushed her out of their room.

The light of the moon allows her to see debris floating throughout the water, but she sees no signs of life. She closes her eyes and breathes deeply. Her husband must be dead. If he were alive, he would have found her by now.

She begins to wish that she had not begged him to take her out on the boat. He had said no, that it was dangerous and a storm was coming, but she wanted to see the whale her neighbor had mentioned. She convinced him that they would be fine and back before the storm, but she was wrong.

Her hands rise to shield her face as lights in the distance appear. Squinting, she realizes that those lights are boats, dozens of them. She waves her arms frantically, hoping to get their attention. More lights begin to shine on her face and as they close in on her she feels relieved. The sound of the boats' engines ceases and silence meets her ears. Shouts from the boat drivers fill the air as they hop from their ships and run to rescue her.



*Hands*  
by Liberty Price

## When We Were Little Kids

by Triniti Johnson

Once we were little kids  
With hope in our eyes and dreams in  
our minds,  
Wanting to grow up so fast and not  
waste any time.  
We would play grown ups in  
anticipation to walk across the street alone,  
All we wanted was to become grown.

Once we were little kids  
Who had just turned ten,  
Asking for more “grown-up” responsibilities  
time and time again.  
As being double digits, we thought  
we were old  
We began not to listen to what we  
were told.

Once we were little kids  
We finally became “Teens”,  
As thirteen is big and bad as if we  
were eighteen.  
We went to the mall with our friends  
alone,  
We were so proud to be “grown-up”  
that it had to be known.

Once we were little kids  
But we aren't so little anymore,  
As time goes on, we wish to be grown  
nevermore.  
At the beginning, all we wanted was  
that diploma in our hands,  
We just couldn't wait for our big  
plans.  
As we are getting older, our friends  
go one by one

Off to a new beginning as their  
lives have just begun.  
It is our time to leave soon too but  
a tug in our hearts say not to leave  
As we don't want to see our parents  
grieve.

Once we were little kids  
With hope in our eyes and dreams in  
our minds.  
Now we are grown, sad of what we will leave  
behind.



*Endless Notes*  
by Briana Tamayo

Always with me  
by Ryan Jones

I can feel It standing there.  
Behind me.  
It's always behind me.  
Hovering a few inches from the back  
of my head.  
I turn around and try to get a  
glimpse of It,  
but It moves with me.  
It never leaves.  
Constantly feeding off my paranoia.

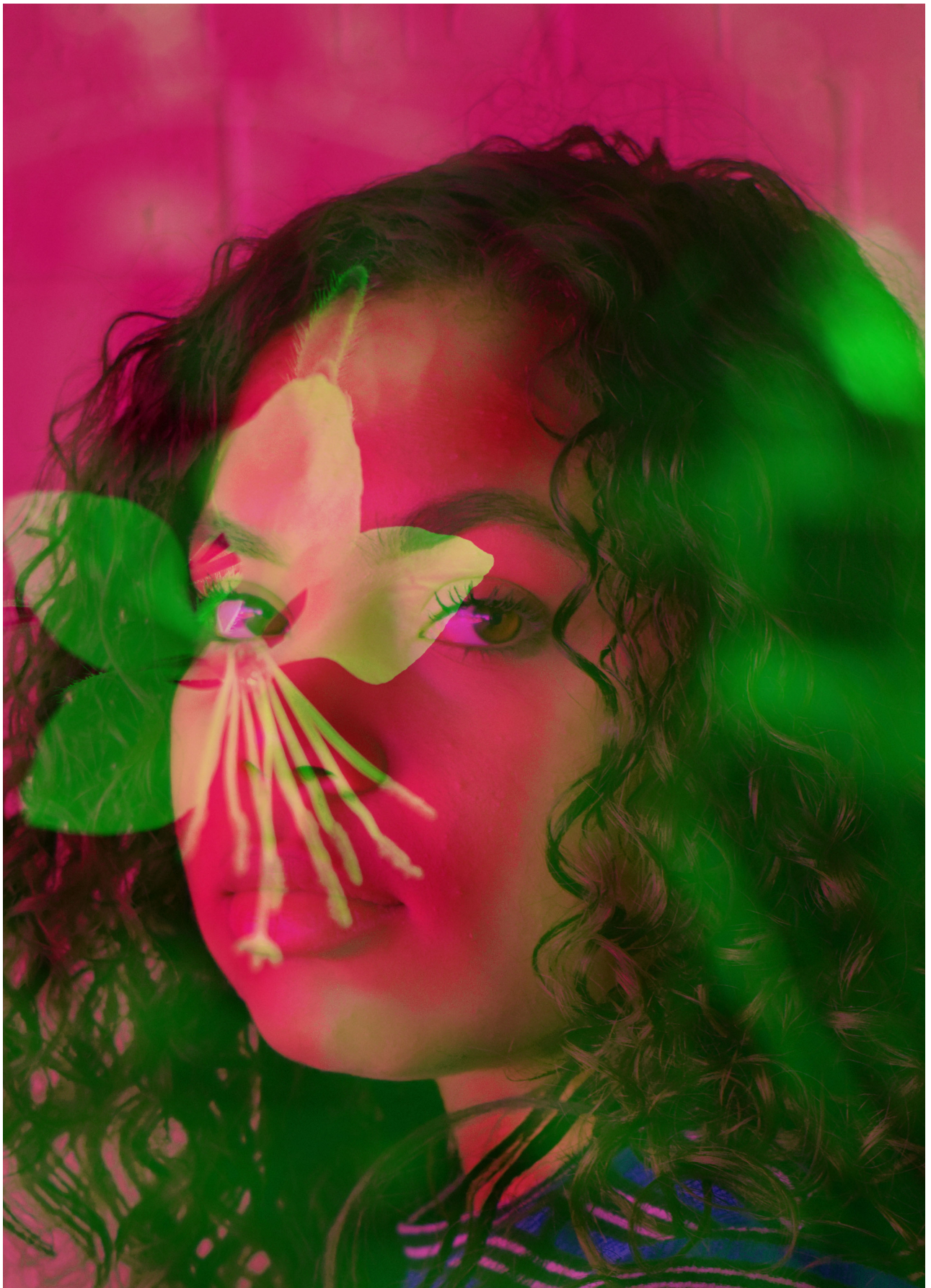
It's also in my head.  
It knows my thoughts and fears.  
My fear of It.  
It wants me to be afraid.  
Keeping me on edge.

I don't know why It's here,  
or what It is.  
A nameless,  
Genderless,  
Formless entity.

I can't escape Its and I never will.



*Jacket*  
by Miller Bannister



*Yessuh*  
by Helena Bridge



## Waffles Are Better than Pancakes

by Jaime Herrera

The argument that pancakes are better than waffles has been around for many years. Pancakes are one of the most popular breakfast items and make a lot of people feel at home and nostalgic. But many other people argue that waffles are better than pancakes, saying the waffles are more versatile and they are easier to make and serve, and they are right.

Unlike pancakes, waffles are extremely more versatile.

Frozen waffles have made breakfast easier. If someone is running late for work, they are easier to make compared to pancakes. Waffles have even made holding syrup and other toppings less of a hassle. Unlike pancakes, “the square waffle texture gives you ideal toppings and syrup storage” (Reasons...). This makes cleaning up syrup off the counter not necessary. Waffles have also transformed the way we eat ice cream. Nearly every child that has eaten ice cream pairs it with a waffle cone, even some adults when they feel like splurging on their diet. The square texture of the waffle has been taken on as waffle fries, which are very popular at many fast food restaurants. Waffle fries have increased the versatility of waffles, making them even more desirable, and made waffles more popular in other meals of the day, like lunch and dinner. One of the most popular dinner meals are chicken and waffles. The “mixture of the sweet, syrupy waffles and the perfectly fried savory chicken” makes the combination unforgettable (Reasons...). The combination of the two is like no other and cannot be compared to.

Pancakes are especially harder to make compared to waffles. The flip of the pancake has to be just right unless a folded pancake is desirable. Pancakes “tend to scare away amateur cooks because they can be unpredictable and fussy to make” (Reasons...). A waffle only has to be put in the iron for a certain amount of time until it is cooked perfectly and then it is ready to serve. Not only are they easy to make, but they do not become soggy. Pancakes become soggy fairly quickly but the sogginess of a waffle is not something that one has to worry about.

Waffles have been shown to be more versatile by ice cream cones, fries, and paired with fried chicken, and easier to make compared to pancakes. Even though pancakes have their perks, waffles are essentially better.

A Letter From Your Mirror  
by Amelia Sumangil

You speak to my surface every  
morning  
In harsh whispers, the words:  
Not enough

You sigh and you pose and critique  
every angle  
And like a mantra of hate:  
Not enough

If only you knew that it hurts me  
too  
Watching you tear yourself apart  
If I had a mouth or a voice or a  
sign  
I'd say that you're more than enough

I'd beg you to shatter my surface of  
glass  
And with the shards that scatter the  
floor  
Cut your soul free from the hate you  
give  
You're not enough  
You're more



by Elizabeth Bacherini

# CHERYL BARBER

*By Steven Wegrzynowicz*

Cheryl Barber is as follows: She is a teacher who teaches future teachers to be teachers. And, that was enough to make me want to interview her. To consider it and lay it plainly on a line almost sounds as though it would diminish what she is doing. But, in a world where more and more people in the public look down on the career, or parents tell their children that school really doesn't matter right now, Barber is standing against that tide and trying to hold it back on her own. Cheryl Barber is a distinguished teacher who has helped to mold many future educators towards our profession, several of which have gone on to become teachers in our own district.

She has a thoughtful smile and the quiet dedication of someone entrenched in what they were meant to be doing with their lives. I have said for a decade now, teaching is the worst job, if you don't truly love it. No one gets rich as a teacher. Many do not get much respect as a teacher. When teachers tell people in the community that they are a teacher, they will get the same sounds and condolences as if they had told them you are having an appendage amputated. Or, they say, "I just don't know how you do it, I think I would hurt someone", and I believe them.



*Photo by  
Amanda Baldwin*

Cheryl Barber is in her twenty-seventh year of teaching. Unfortunately, at that point in any career, people often will typically bring up your retirement as a point of the conversation, like the weather. Oh yes, it has been rather warm, and I will garden, or travel, or read other novels than the same five every year. But, Barber has no real answer to that question from the random passerby because, "there is not a day I [Barber] don't look forward to going to work". When you love your job, and you are great at it, why would you leave?

I record each of the interviews I do with the subjects of these profiles. It makes everyone uncomfortable at first, and at several times they will wave a hand and say "Please don't put that in the article". I interviewed her originally before Spring Break of 2020 and I found the conversation oddly comforting as

well as unnerving as I listened to it again in October. When I heard line I just quoted (above), Barber was focused and unwavering. It sounded absolute in absolute times. I am human, and in an environment with Remote Learners looming, constantly logging in and out of Zoom class periods, making sure my microphone is on, the screen capture is working, and my attendance is due; I not ashamed to say I have not always agreed with Barber in the sentiment of "always looking forward to work".

I sat down with her again after listening over our interview to get her fresh perspective. Maybe I was hoping, just a little, that she would show some of the world weary signs I have seen in colleagues, frustrated as I have been this year. But, I was disappointed. If anything, Cheryl Barber doubled-down on her stance. She is still happy to be here every day because, as she says, "the kids are the kids are the kids", echoing our superintendent's own saying of "the main thing is the main thing, and the main thing, is kids". To Barber, the kids have not changed and neither will her excitement for what we all do everyday as teachers.

Her newest class of students looks the same as our own, the kids and her wear their masks, physical proximity is now something traceable, and remote students sit on the Zoom line like muted ghosts haunting the classroom with their ceiling fans and various K-Pop posters in the background. But, it also shows the hallmarks of a great educator. This year, her class boasts the most excitement towards their TAFE competition in

storytelling books, interactive bulletin boards, impromptu speeches, and classroom ethical decision making. Assignments that are typical of the TAFE students, learning to become educators in their careers, are bleeding into her normal classrooms and the students are eating it up. In what can only be described as the most exhausting year of education many have experienced, there are students coming from her class excited to join the profession in their futures.

Furthermore, the TAFE program in most years will ask for an educator from our district to come speak at a luncheon held for them and have a Q&A. And, the luncheon has been largely a success. Barber says, "I have been shocked because the kids always pick well", they always pick educators who love what they do and do it well. Among the previous invitees have been esteemed and profound educators like Dr. Young, Dr. Munoz, myself, as well as much of our faculty over the years. I include myself among the list because I can say from first hand experience that I was impressed as those students lobbed interesting, wise questions that I would not have known to ask about education until I was a junior in college. They were young, gallant, promising educators already looking forward to their own time to jump to the front of the classroom and inspire others in the ways they were inspired by their own favorite teachers from the years.

Like any other program, the TAFE organization goes through waves, but there is always a core of five or six who

are truly dedicated to the group, and Barber still finds the experience “amazing to see these students who are already excited about the profession and feeling the call to it at such a young age.” Since she took over the program and rejuvenated it, they began to compete with local area schools but now they average that every other year they have students advance to Nationals.

These are not the headlines for our school, but they should be. These students work incredibly hard and their future students will be the ones who reap their rewards. And, now after twenty seven years of dedication, she now has many former students who have now gone onto work for our own district. “It is the coolest thing to see” she said about watching her students become teachers in AISD. But, admittedly, Barber gets the same excitement when she sees them at Walmart. The manager of the Sprint store who helped her with her phone last year was her former student; it made her day.

With each of these profiles, the difficulty is in what should make it into the article that will tell the reader how much these educators mean to our school as a whole. Do I include the laundry list of community and charity work Barber does with Breakfast on Beech Street, or a food pantry at her church? Do I worry about whether the fact that she and her family bleed Black and Gold, yet somehow she is a treasure to our own Red and Blue? Or, do I just leave you with this: If you do not know Cheryl Barber yet, go to her class or stop her in the hall. To know her is to know one of the bricks that supports Cooper High

School. And, if you are struggling for a light or shining example of how a teacher can stay passionate throughout a career, or even just keep their passion for teaching alive in the Covid classroom environment, find Cheryl and she will tell you.